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**AFGHANISTAN**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Orchards Fruitful Again in Arghandab

**Village elders give AVIPA Plus projects a unanimous thumbs-up at district shura**



Photo credit: IRD/AVIPA Plus

*More than 60 Arghandab elders gave testimony on the effectiveness of USAID-funded orchard rehabilitation projects. Some orchard owners expect a five-fold increase in income compared to previous years.*

***Cash for Work projects by USAID's AVIPA Plus provided jobs for hundreds of unemployed laborers who cleaned and pruned damaged and neglected orchards, and led farmers to their best orchards in years.***

The Arghandab Valley was once known as the orchard of Central Asia, exporting pomegranates, apricots, and plums around the world. But three decades of war left many of its orchards and vineyards in ruins, crippling fruit exports and creating widespread unemployment in the region.

Ali Mateen is an elderly apricot farmer who walks with the help of a heavy cane. He was one of 60 village elders at a recent shura meeting discussing the recent USAID funded Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture Plus (AVIPA Plus) orchard rehabilitation projects in the Arghandab District of Kandahar Province.

When farmers were asked to give testimony, Ali Mateen was one of the first to raise his hands. "I remember the days before the Russians came here, it was a green paradise. However, they destroyed our canals and with no irrigation, our trees died. My orchard was full of dead trees," he said in a trembling voice. "Now my apricot trees can breathe, and the trees are heavy with fruit."

Over the course of a year, farmers received 600,000 fruit tree saplings to replace trees lost to drought and disease. Farmers also received training in the latest pest management techniques, including simple, eco-friendly methods that can eradicate infestations with soap and water.

Heads nodded and hands shot up as Hajji Mohammed, head of the District Development Assembly, asked, "Who of you will earn more with your orchards this year?" One farmer expects his annual income to rise from \$6,000 to more than \$30,000.

Cash for Work projects provided \$2.5 million in wages to more than 12,000 laborers, offering income alternatives to those who might be tempted to join the insurgency.

"Many of our young men have done small jobs for the Taliban because they had no other options," Hajji Mohammed said. "We said to them, 'We have a better alternative.' Whether you're a farmer or a laborer, everyone deserves a fresh start."